

an out-sourced merchandise-return service having service affiliations with a network of distributed locations at which the out-source merchandise-return service facilitates an out-sourced merchandise return program on behalf of the remote merchandisers;

wherein said out-sourced merchandise-return service implements said out-sourced merchandise return program in part by provision of merchandise-return information storage means for storing merchandise-return information applicable to merchandise of the merchandisers; and

wherein the distributed locations are linked to the merchandise-return information storage means by a communications medium and handle physical processing of return merchandise inputted to a given location based on the merchandise-return information extracted from the merchandise-return information storage means according to the inputted input record, which merchandise-return information includes return fulfillment instructions that for some merchandisers is likely substantially unvarying and for other merchandisers is likely highly dynamic over time, allowing progressive amendment after amendment with the merchandise-return information storage means long after the origination of the original input record.

~~16~~  
~~15.~~ The merchandise return system of claim 14 wherein:

the network of distributed locations includes assorted warehouses.

~~17~~  
~~16.~~ The merchandise return system of claim 14 wherein:

the input record facilitates research of information in the merchandise-return information storage means.

*18*  
17. The merchandise return system of claim 14 further comprising a processing system associated with the merchandise-return information storage means, for processing contacts by the given distributed locations requesting merchandise-return information on the basis of a given input record, as well as for serving responsive communications to the pertinent requesting location, whereby the responsive communications can include return fulfillment instructions.

*19*  
18. The merchandise return system of claim 17 wherein said contacts by the given distributed locations on the basis of a given input record further cause an award process with the processing system which, in cases of positive award decisions, authorizes an award in favor of a given award party, which award can be chosen from any of instant credit, credit provisional that the merchandiser certifies the propriety of the return upon a later date or event, credit honored by a given association of merchants only, a refund in cash or equivalent, and/or any combinations thereof.

*20*  
19. The merchandise return system of claim 14 further comprising:  
a return slip included with returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment of the original purchase transaction therefor, which return slip includes information that allows specific identification of a specific distributed location.

*21*  
20. The merchandise return system of claim 19 wherein the return slip incorporates any of alphanumeric text, bar codes, or magnetic strips which require reading by machines or not as applicable.